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Rural community information services

A literature review and guidelines for developing services

General Information Programme and UNISIST

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Scientific and Cultural Organization

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RURAL COMMUNITY INFORMATION SERVICES

A literature review and guidelines for developing services

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P R E F A C E

In developed countries there is a growing recognition of the fact that individuals and communities have a right to information. In the UK, for example, the National Consumer Council identified this as the fourth right of citizenship (51). In response to this a wide range of community information and advice services have been established.

If individuals and communities in the developed world have an acknowledged right to accessible information, how much more important it is to acknowledge such a right in the context of rural communities in developing countries. These communities are faced with major changes, many of which are imposed from outside by alien and unfamiliar agencies. If individuals within rural communities are to cope with the daily problems facing them and if the communities themselves are to manage their own socio-economic and cultural development they must, as a right, have access to at least a basic minimum of information.

A right to accessible information alone, however, is not enough. To provide substance to that right itis necessary to evolve and develop information services that meet the needs of rural communities.

For this reason the Section on Public Libraries of the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) has embarked on a projet to promote and to assist the development of such community information services in the rural areas of developing countries. The four stages of the project are :

- A literature review to establish the state of the art and to provide guidelines on the development of rural community information services.

- Research, in a small number of locations, to establish the nature, scope and extent of the need for community information services.

- Establishing, monitoring and evaluating a small number of experimental information services, including the testing of the manual <u>Rural community resource centres : a guide for developing countries</u> (24).

- Dissemination of the results throughout the whole programme.

This document has been prepared, as the first of these stages, under contract with IFLA, by Elaine Kempson of Acumen in the UK. The author has extensive experience of researching, planning and developing community and advice services.

An initial draft of this report has been sent to a wide range of individuals for their comments and suggestions and these have been

incorporated in this draft. Acknowledgement is made, in particular, of the assistance provided by Gloria Dillsworth, Suzanne Fustukian, Shirley Giggey, Garth Graham, King Mchombu, Nick Moore and Wendy Simmons.

Readers are invited to send comments, suggestions or requests for additional copies to Mr A. Abid, Division of the General Information Programme, Unesco, 7, Place de Fontenoy, 75700 PARIS, France.

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INTRODUCTION

The library is a concrete structure inaccessible to Nyanjiru, and Nyaniru as a library user is unacceptable to the librarians.

For Nyanjiru there is no time to waste, no compromises to be made. Her aims are simple and clear, all her labour and thoughts are to satisfy her family's basic material needs: food, clothing and shelter. Anything that helps her in this work she accepts with open arms and mind. Anything that prevents her from acquiring her needs she will fight. Her information needs are also clear - she wants that information which will help her produce and protect her material needs.

... The world of Nyanjiru and the world of library services, as they exist today, are far apart. Libraries based on traditions of foreign information practices cannot serve the needs of people like Nyanjiru. Nyanjiru belongs to her own people's information system based on oral traditions and experiences of history which she can understand, trust and apply in order to fight for her existence.

Shiraz Durrani, writing in the University of Nairobi Library Magazine, makes this emotional call for librarians to evolve services that are relevant to the needs of rural communities in developing countries(20). This same theme has been echoed by an ever growing group of librarians, concerned that public library services, modelled on those in Western Europe and North America, have little relevance to such rural people(17,26,28,31,33,37,

45,52,58,69). All propose that librarians should begin to question their basic assumptions about public library services and develop, in their place, services that reflect the more fundamental needs of rural people. People who have low rates of literacy, yet a highly developed oral culture and whose main preoccupation is making basic material provision for themselves and their families.

Services that have been designed to meet these sorts of basic needs are not entirely new to librarians. In North America libraries have been involved for some time in the establishment of information and referral services, aiming to put people in need in touch with the social welfare services designed to help them. In Europe and Australia libraries have become involved in developing community information services, which are less involved in referral services and more likely to be working alongside or supporting non-governmental organisations that provide advice and information.

A working party of the British Library Association has defined community information services as those

> ... which assist individuals and groups with daily problem solving and with participation in the democratic process. The services concentrate on the needs of those who do not have ready access to other sources of assistance, and on the most important problems that people have to face, problems to do with their homes, their jobs and their rights(32).

The relevance of such services to Nyanjiru in rural Kenya is fairly clear.

At the same time as these issues have been considered by librarians, there has been a parallel, wider, debate about the applicability of technologies from the industrialised world to the needs of rural people in developing countries. This has led to

concepts such as appropriate technology, appropriate health care and, linked to them, appropriate information. Saracevic advocates the development of appropriate information which

> ... should be problem-oriented, self-contained, directly applicable, scaled for local use, able to reach the disadvantaged and communicable through traditional channels(62).

It was in response to developments such as these that the IFLA Section of Public Libraries decided to seek funds to develop a programme of work on rural community information services in developing countries. A small working group met at the 1987 IFLA conference n Brighton and produced a four stage programme for the work:

* a literature review to establish the state of the art and provide guidelines for later stages of the programme;

* research, in a small number of locations, to establish the nature, scope and extent of the need for community information services;

* establishing, monitoring and evaluating a small number of experimental community information services, including testing the manual *Rural community resource centres: a guide for developing countries* (24);

* dissemination of the results throughout the whole programme.

This report, funded jointly by Unesco and IFLA, is a review of the literature that is relevant to librarians and others wanting to work with rural communities in developing countries to establish relevant community information services. It draws on literature

from the fields of communication and community development, as well as librarianship, in an attempt to learn from others who have been faced with similar challenges. The information is presented in three main sections:

* Analysing community needs

* Establishing appropriate services

* Monitoring and evaluating for future development

Each of these begins with an overview of the existing literature and then draws from this practical guidelines. The underlying philosophy, throughout, is that a participatory approach should be undertaken. That is, that the local communities themselves should play an important part in analysing their own needs as well as in establishing the service and monitoring and evaluating its success. The need for participation is a recurrent theme in the literature of community development in rural areas. Since the traditional approach to developing library services has been no more successful at meeting rural needs than most other services, librarians would do well to learn from the lessons of others(16,22,75).

While the participation of members of the community is important it should be recognised that the development of a community information service will not happen spontaneously. Such developments usually depend on an outside stimulus or catalyst. In many cases this stimulus will be provided by community development or extension workers, in others it will be a librarian or cultural officer. Whoever it is, they will be bringing to the rural community a new set of ideas and new ways of doing things. The extent to which these workers can achieve their goals will depend greatly on their ability to adapt their approach so that it

fits in with the needs, expectations, and the accepted ways of doing things within the rural community.

This report, therefore, is aimed at librarians, community development workers and cultural officers who are working to develop local library and information services in rural areas. it is not intended for people who have substantial research or practical community experience, although in many cases it draws directly on the lessons such people have learned through experience.

In her work in Zimbabwe Wendy Simmons found that to be effective workers should:

* Be known to the community and considered to be appropriate people for the work.

* Be chosen by the community, or at least, with the acceptance of the community.

* Be introduced to the community in ways that satisfied all the traditional and current political protocol requirements.

* Be constantly present in the community, providing help and attention.

* Be prepared to accept the fact that, at their level, they had little control over the treatment of their clients or users by agencies outside the community(36).

She also identified the use of volunteers as an important issue. Based on her work in Seke she feels that where volunteers are used, they should be recruited with a clear understanding, if that is the case, that they can never expect to get paid for the work, and

therefore, there should be no coercion whatsoever for them to accept or continue the work if they do not wish to do so(36).

The final point to note is that the report concentrates solely on the provision of information. The importance of traditional library services to support the formal education sector is not denied: it is simply outside the scope of the report.

ANALYSING COMMUNITY NEEDS

A great deal of research has been undertaken, in Britain, North America and Australia, to identify the extent and nature of the needs for community information services(7,8,12,13,14,19,22,27, 55,59,60,71). It is clear from this that, even in the industrialised countries, there is a need for services that concentrate on providing information for daily living. The precise nature of that need is a reflection of the particular society and its social welfare provision.

There has, however, been very little comparable research in developing countries. The two main published studies were carried out in Badeku, Nigeria(2,3,4) and Kapari and Viriolo, Papua New Guinea(67,68). In addition there are further studies that have not yet been published. Detailed research into needs for information was undertaken in Seke village in Zimbabwe(63) and two research studies have just commenced – one in Botswana and Malawi(36), the other in the Philippines(76).

The Nigerian research was carried out by staff at the Department of Library Studies at the University of Ibadan. it formed a part of a larger study of rural development information system research (RUDIS) which was started in 1981. Using a combination of action research and participant observation they identified the areas of need shown on page 8.

The second study, in Papua New Guinea, used an interview survey and group discussions to explore the main information needs in two villages (the villages from which the researcher's parents

Areas of Information Need	Specific Information Requests
Health	Treatment of malaria Antenatal and post-natal care Nutrition of the young and the old Cure of infertility Nearest hospitals and medical centres Effects of cigarette smoking Pit latrines and environmental sanitation
Problems of Daily Existence	Water supply Electricity Good roads Employment problems and opportunities
Occupation	Supply of fertilizer Supply of other farm inputs New methods of cultivation Money-yielding ventures Loans and credit facilities

Areas of Information Need	Specific Information Requests
Government and Society	Government programmes and projects Party politics and factions Local government administration Government functionaries Election machineries
Recreation and Leisure	Supply of new books and magazines Visits of cinema vans Results of football games Fortunes of favourite local football team
Education	Adult education classes Government plans to eradicate illiteracy
Religion	Supply of Islamic literature

had come). In these, information on small scale economic development was the need most strongly expressed. Second in importance was the need for information on community welfare which would improve the lives of village people. The improvement of

traditional food crops through the introduction of new varieties of garden produce or improved agricultural techniques was the other need.

Knowledge to improve family health through better nutrition, hygiene and treatment of disease was identified as a need by only a small number of people. Yet the researcher notes that the perceived need fails to match the 'real need'. It simply reflects the situation where relatively high infant mortality, malnutrition among children and endemic disease is accepted as an inevitable fact of life. In general he concludes that:

> The village perception on information need showed that a considerable gap exists between government perceptions and those of village people on many matters besides information needs(68).

The research study, in Botswana and Malawi, aims to build upon the work in Nigeria and Papua New Guinea and to identify information needs through two fairly large scale household surveys, followed up by group discussions(36). The Philippine research is using participant observation, in-depth interviews and group discussion(76).

In contrast to the small amount of research on needs, there has been rather more on the sources of information used in rural communities, including a number of studies on the use of official information channels.

Many studies have shown that people turn first to informal sources for information - their family, friends and neighbours(28,30, 64,67,68). The household interviews in Papua New Guinea showed that:

> The extended local community itself is both the most highly favoured source of information and regarded as the most effective. ...[it] was identified by all respondents as a source of their general knowledge of government projects and activities in their local area. A large majority of those who had actively sought information on government matters had used the extended community as its main source(67).

A survey in Jamaica has shown that 46 per cent of those people who would seek information and advice would go to friends, neighbours and relatives(64). Similarly a survey of villagers in Sri Lanka showed that, as regards agricultural information,

> ... transfer of information direct from person to person by word of mouth was considered by them to be the most effective method(30).

The research in Nigeria showed that:

> Formal and informal giving and sharing of information happen all the time at market places and village squares usually situated in front of the rulers' palaces. Nowadays that there are schools, churches and mosques, these places also provide avenues for passing round information affecting the life of the community(2).

A survey of farmers from six villages in the Ibadan area of Nigeria, however, showed that 47 per cent of them said that they had used agricultural extension officers for agricultural information. They were followed in importance by chiefs in the village (45 per cent) and other farmers in the village (43 per cent). In contrast information officers and librarians had been used by very few of the farmers (8 per cent and 5 per cent respectively). The main channels used by agricultural extension

officers to disseminate information to farmers were personal contacts (95 per cent used these regularly or occasionally) and agricultural shows (used regularly or occasionally by 92 per cent)(5).

There are, in rural areas, many other types of extension workers including home economists, health, family planning, literacy, non-formal education, community development, youth and cooperative workers. Not all the research shows that such extension workers are villagers' prime source of information in their area.

In a number of instances these extension services were found to be inadequate(2,20,30,64,68). Research has shown that people are often unaware of their work. In Jamaica, for example, the level of knowledge of social programmes was 'depressingly low'. A quarter of the people living in rural areas who were interviewed could not name a single programme. Overall, the best known was the adult literacy programme (82 per cent of both urban and rural respondents) followed by family planning (34 per cent of all respondents)(64).

Similarly a project which studied the knowledge of relief scheme information by Sri Lankan farmers concluded that there were very high levels of ignorance of the programme. The same study showed that, although there was a multiplicity of agencies involved in agricultural development work at the village level, there was little cooperation between them and the credibility of many was doubted(30).

Research in the Ibadan area of Nigeria, found that there was often a credibility gap in communication.

> Before embracing a new way of doing things, most villagers would like to see actual situations where the new methods have

> produced happy results. Communication of new information and ideas must therefore involve demonstrable results and cannot be limited to just taking ones words for it. There have been cases where agricultural extension workers have been asked by farmers whether they have farms on which they themselves have tried the new scientific methods being introduced to them(2).

The most detailed investigation of extension services, however, was carried out in Papua New Guinea. this identified two important ways in which their impact was being reduced. Firstly their visits to villages were not regular and secondly village people did not accept extension materials as being relevant to them.

> They fail either to meet needs perceived by villagers or to persuade them that government sponsored innovations are of value to their lives ... The conservative nature of traditional society resists the gross charges that are basic to what the extension services attempt to do(68).

The survey in Papua New Guinea also showed that the agencies themselves were aware that information was not reaching village people. Several interconnected causes of this failure were identified. They included:

* the timing of extension worker visits - during public service hours, when villagers are usually away from their villages either fishing or working in their gardens;

* the narrow and low level of training given to extension workers;

* the duplication of services by different agencies;

* the inadequate number of supervisory staff; and

* the unrealistic expectations of the agencies(67,68).

A detailed review of the information needs of agricultural extension workers concluded that they also lack relevant information in the right format and written at the right level(61).

In summary, then, it is clear from existing research that rural people need information that relates to their everyday lives. The precise nature of that need varies from one community to another. By and large the chief sources of information are friends, neighbours and relatives, with information being exchanged as they go about their daily lives. Many rural communities are visited by extension workers who cover areas like agricultural, health, nutrition, literacy, non-formal education and family planning. Villagers vary in the range and levels of use of such service provided to them. There is also some evidence that the extension services may be constrained in what they can achieve, and that the extension workers themselves frequently lack adequate and relevant information sources.

It is possible, therefore, to begin to draw some conclusions about the nature of information services that might be provided to meet the needs of rural people. There is, however, far too little information for detailed planning and it will be necessary to undertake a local analysis of community needs. This will include profiles of:

* the community to be served;

* the primary information providers in the community;

* the information needs of people in the community and the extent to which they are met.

Profiling the community

It has already been stressed that, for them to be successful in the long-term, rural service developments should involve the local people both in researching the need and in establishing the service. The first stage in this process is to begin to build up a detailed picture or profile of the community(3,4,6,24,25,38, 49,56,67,68,70).

The overall aim of the community profile is to get to know the community as a whole - including its socioeconomic and political features, its culture and traditions, its leadership and power structure, its economic potential and how its resources are distributed and the nature of its local institutions and decision-making processes. At the same time it should provide you with views of the community through the eyes of different groups, particularly those that are disadvantaged.

Such profiles generally include:

* a description of the environment;

* a profile of the population;

* an understanding of how different local people spend their lives.

First, the environment. No community exists in isolation, so it will be important to set it in its regional context. In practical terms this will mean consulting any national or regional development plans. Having done this, the next stage is to begin gathering together information on the local area that it is hoped

can be served by a community information service. In concrete terms this means:

* *patterns of settlement and land use* - Is the area entirely agricultural? Where is the housing located? Is there any industrial or commercial area? Are any of these growing or likely to grow in size? What changes are taking place?

* *economics of the community and nature of employment* - What is the main source of income for the local economy? If agriculture, is it subsistence farming or cash crops? Are there cooperatives? Industry? Commerce? How has the economy changed and is change likely in the future?

* *transport and communications* - Is the area served by roads? Are they surfaced? Is there a railway, ferry, airstrip? How far is it to the next community and also to the nearest large community? Is there any local transport? What is its frequency and reliability? Is there a post office or postal service? Are there telephones, radios and televisions in the community? If so how many? Where are they located? How many people have access to them? Are there local newspapers? How widely read are they? What languages are they written in?

* *utilities* - Is there electricity in the village? In which buildings? How extensive is the water supply? Where do local people get their water?

* *facilities* - What is the local provision of, for example, education, health, shopping and leisure facilities? Where do people generally meet socially or to gossip?

* *local government and administration* - Is there a local government office? Is there a traditional system of administration?

Who makes decisions about the local community, what types of decisions are they? When and how are they made and how are they communicated to local people? How and by whom are disputes settled between individuals in the community? Where do people go to ask about or complain about local services?

These headings and questions are not intended to be an exhaustive list. They are intended more as a prompt to encourage further thinking about a community and its make-up.

Collecting this information will involve reading any reports that are available, and talking to key people in the community. These more formal sources should, however, be counter-balanced by an attempt to see things from the villagers' point of view. There may be local transport in theory, but it could be unreliable and overcrowded. Similarly the system of local government or administration may look quite different through the eyes of someone who is not in authority. This perspective can be acquired by informal meetings with villagers and by observation, ideally through living in the community or by working closely with someone who does. It will be particularly important at this stage to begin to make contact with sections of the community that have least power and influence - low caste people, and women for example.

At the same time as information is being collected about the environment, work should be undertaken to collect demographic information about the local community and also to compare it with similar information for the region or the country as a whole. This will include information such as:

* *the size of the population* - both overall and within particular age groups? What is the ratio of males to females and does this ratio vary between age groups? Is the population growing or declining, and, if so, at what rate?

* *ethnicity* - Are all villagers of the same ethnic, tribal or caste background? If not what are the proportions in each group? What are the relations between them? What languages are usually spoken by each of them and which other languages are they able to speak?

* *literacy* - How many people have basic literacy skills, that is are able to read and write well enough to use basic instructional material? How does this proportion vary between age groups, between men and women and between different ethnic, tribal or caste groups? Which languages do these people read and write and are they the languages they normally use in conversation?

* *education* - How many people have been to formal school and how many years of schooling have they had? How does this proportion vary between age groups, men/women and different ethnic groups? How many people have attended non-formal education? Again which groups are they, and what have they studied?

* *socio-economic problems* - What are the main problems faced by different groups in the community?

* *health* - What is the perinatal mortality rate - what is it at birth and within the first year of life? What is the life expectancy? What are the main causes of ill-health and of death? How do all of these vary between the different groups in the community?

* *income* - What is the average income of people in the community as a whole? How does this vary between groups? What is the main source of income? Are there government relief or social

security programmes? Which groups do they cover and what is the extent of help?

* *housing* - What type and size of housing do villagers live in? What variations exist between groups? Who provides the housing? What proportion of families have amenities such as water, latrines, electricity and how does this vary between different groups?

* *employment* - What proportion of the population is formally employed? Works in the non-formal sector? Is self-employed? Is unemployed? How does this vary between different groups?

* *historical outline of the community* - What are the symbols, totems, main festivals and major historical episodes? These will be important in ensuring that the information service takes seriously the cultural heritage of the community.

If there has been a recent census in the country it will have collected some of this information. It is likely, however, that separate figures from small areas will not be available in printed form(39). The first step will, therefore, be to check whether published figures *are* available for the community, failing that the local administration may have acquired them in unpublished form. Similarly specific government departments - education, health, agriculture - may have produced their own analysis of census data. If all these avenues fail to provide the necessary information, the only remaining option will be to contact the government department that carried out the census to see whether a special analysis would be possible. An alternative would be to use statistics collected for other purposes by other government departments or the local administration. It may be necessary to piece this information together, but it should be possible to gather at least the basic statistics.

Non-governmental and community development organisations also frequently undertake information collection programmes. Where such information is available it will be particularly valuable for a community profile(30,51).

Experience from rural community development projects, however, indicates that it is important to really get to know the people in the community - to appreciate not only their physical circumstances and social and political environment but their beliefs, traditions, values and psychological outlook, their life style and the daily demands upon their time and energy(1,2,14,15,29,30,31,32,33, 34,36,44,49,53). This may seem obvious, but many well-intentioned projects have failed because they did not really understand the local people(15).

For this reason the statistics and other information already collected will need to be supplemented by meeting all sections of the community, where they live, observing their conditions and their lifestyle and listening carefully and patiently to their points of view. Again this information is generally collected through discussions and observation(2,16,20,24,47,63,67,68). Things to look out for, in particular, are how different members of the family spend their day, who do they meet? With whom do they exchange information and where? Which local facilities do they use? How much free time do they have? What local groups do they belong to? Are there seasonal patterns to their lifestyle? What festivals take place? Clearly the answers to these questions will be different for different groups in the community.

Developing a community profile could become a major task on its own, taking years to compile. It is important, therefore, to keep the work in perspective. Be quite clear why you are collecting information - it is to provide basic information about the numbers,

lifestyle and needs of people in the community, that will be required for planning a community information service. Its secondary function, but every bit as important, is to begin the process of participation by local people and to see needs through their eyes not your own preconceptions(16,22,75).

In general, if you have never prepared a community profile previously, do not feel that you have to produce a comprehensive and sophisticated report the first time. The golden rule is to keep things simple and collect only the information that is felt to be essential. If more information is needed it can always be collected later. Too much information will confuse rather than clarify the situation.

The following outline profile, prepared by the research team in Badeku, Nigeria, will give an indication of the type of information you should aim to collect(3).

> Badeku village is situated about 17 miles from the University of Ibadan campus south-east of Ibadan city. It is, according to the new local government set-up, within the Lagelu East local government area. The population is estimated at 1,230 with about 274 households divided into 11 big extended family group compounds (agbo-ile). Each agbo-ile has a family head. Their names are Laoyin, Bolodeoku, Olaifa, Aribikofa, Balogun Ojeniyi, Dasò Funjo, Obidare, Seriki, Ogungbila and Akewula. In Yoruba communities the agbo-ile, or the extended family group compounds, are very important in that they form the bedrock of social organisation.
>
> Like in Ibadan, the attainment of the status of the head chief or Baale is not hereditary. One starts as the head of his extended family compound and through series of promotions attains higher and higher ranks of chieftaincy until he gets in the line of selection as the Baale. Most of the people are born in the village and in-migration to the village from other parts is insignificant. It has been found that like other rural areas, there is a depletion of the 11-30 age brackets. Most of the young and able bodied men have left the village, leaving the very young and the very old.

The educational level in the village is still very low. But with the introduction of free primary education, most of the children now receive at least six years of schooling. There is no school higher than a primary school, and those who wish to go further in their education have to go elsewhere. Most of the adults did not receive any form of education. The willingness to learn is however manifested in their constant demand for provision for adult education classes. Some of the adults can read in English as well as Yoruba, while a few more can read only in Yoruba and a small number in Arabic.

Badeku is lacking in many social amenities. There is no electricity or pipeborne water supply. Villagers obtain water from shallow wells, streams and ponds, some of which are without water during the dry season. In the absence of a supply of clean water, it is no wonder that the indicence of water-borne diseases is quite high in the village. Environmental sanitation is very low. There are no big markets in the village, the nearest being at Egbeda some three miles away. Sales of cooked food, ingredients, provisions and farm products are carried on under the shade of trees in front of houses.

Not much social activity is noticeable in the village. On most days the village looks deserted and desolate. Only a few toddlers and women can be seen moving around in front or near their houses. A number of goats, chickens and other live-stock can also be seen roaming around the village. Most men leave the village early in the morning for their farms, and it is only on Fridays that they usually remain in the village, being their work-free day and also the day for Muslim worship. Most of the villagers are in fact Muslims. There are a few Christians, and vaguely pervasive influence of traditional religious practices.

Most of the villagers are farmers, either on full-time or part-time basis. Some people are engaged in petty trading, tailoring, carpentry, hunting, drumming, bricklaying, laundry, blacksmithing and bicycle repair. The main local industries are soap making and cloth dyeing, both of which are exclusively controlled by the women.

Badeku itself is surrounded by a number of other villages which are smaller. It is linked to a major inter-city road by a few kilometres of untarred road, but one which is fairly passable throughout the year.

Preparing a profile of the primary information providers

No information service exists in a vacuum. For this reason it is important to have a clear picture of existing information provision

before any steps are taken to plan a new service. This should include both the formal channels for information provision and the informal traditional means of information exchange(4,24,32,38, 39,70).

Formal channels

Depending on the size of the community, there will already be a number of existing channels of information. These may include:

* *government services* - literacy, health, agriculture, nutrition, home economics, family planning, community development, libraries, schools, non-formal educators and local government officials;

* *non-governmental bodies* - groups could be providing services in any of the above areas but are particularly likely to cover community development, literacy, health or consumer matters;

* *traditional sources* - such as religious leaders, village elders, traditional courts;

* *mass media* - radio, newspapers and, possibly, television.

A small-scale survey could be undertaken of the first two groups: government services and non-governmental bodies. The community profile should have helped you identify the people you need to interview. It is not really necessary to undertake a formal research survey, but should you decide to do so the range of research techniques described in the next section, *Profiling information needs*, can be applied. It should, however, be sufficient to prepare a checklist of topics to be covered during the interview and to

take notes of the replies. The checklist would include topics such as:

* Who provides the money for and manages the service? is it provided from outside the community?

* What is its prime objective? Is it service delivery (eg. providing actual health care), educational or informational?

* Is there a permanent office in the village, a village worker or visits by extension workers?

* On which days and at what times is the service available?

* How many staff are involved in providing information, what level of formal education have they had and what specific training for their job was provided?

* On which subjects are they able to provide information? Which, in practice, are the main ones they actually give information on?

* In which formats do they supply information? These might include personal contacts; posters, leaflets; seminars, workshops or discussion groups; demonstrations; radio or TV talks; films or slides; puppet theatre, plays or other folk media. Do they already have a resource centre for use by the community?

* How many people do they provide with information in a year? From which groups are they drawn? Note, however, that statistics may relate to the number of enquiries not the number of enquirers;

* Is there a mechanism for feeding information back from local people as well as to them? For example, can villagers feed back their views and experiences of, say, new agricultural practices or are they just taught how to use them?

* Where do they get their own information? What formats is it supplied in? Are there gaps in provision? Do they repackage information for use in the community? If so, in what way?

* What contacts do they have with other information providers?(4,24,32,38,39,70).

Interviews with traditional information providers would focus on their role in the community, the people to whom they provide information, the subject matter and format of that information and the method by which it is provided.

Finally, the details of mass media channels would include the frequency, content and intended audience; who produces the programmes or articles, and how many people in the community are either able to listen to a radio programme or have the necessary literacy skills to read an article.

Informal channels

It has already been noted that, for most people, informal channels are their main methods of getting the information they need. A full research study into the traditional patterns of communication will be beyond the finances and time available to most people considering establishing a community information service. Instead information can be collected by:

* observation and informal discussions with local people, whilst compiling the community profile(16,75);

* covering the sources, both informal and formal, actually used by people in the research into information needs(5,8,12,13,18, 48,59,67,68,70).

Researching community information needs

Assessing needs for information is notoriously difficult, it is, however, an essential part of planning a community information service in countries where such provision is not commonplace. A number of ways of carrying out such an analysis have been used each of which as its own advantages and disadvantages. These are discussed in some detail below.

Using social indicators

Where it has been possible to collect detailed statistics for the community profile, Christina Beal has shown that one of the easiest and cheapest ways of assessing need is to use these to produce social or community indicators(6). An example would be the proportion of people with literacy skills. Such indicators are generally expressed comparatively - for example the village has the third highest level of literacy in the district - or as a ratio - the village has a literacy rate of 30 per cent or 300 in 1000 people.

In general there are two types of indicators:

* descriptive indicators, which, as their name suggests, describe an area and are to be taken at face value;

* diagnostic indicators, where they are used as an indicator for a need which cannot be measured directly. The two most common are social needs or social deprivation. For example, low levels of income, lack of water supply, low life expectancy would together indicate an area of social deprivation(6).

To assess the level of information need, it is necessary first to identify the overall community needs. In a community for example there might be needs for an improved water supply, improved environmental health, higher levels of literacy. Having recognised these basic needs the next stage is to select those to which an information service might usefully contribute. In our example the community would probably benefit from information on building pit latrines, basic environmental health information and information and materials to support literacy work. A further refinement, if the statistics are detailed enough, would be to identify specific groups in the community with particularly high or neglected needs. For example some groups in the community will need more support with literacy than others.

There are, however, limitations to this approach. Firstly, indicators are less objective than they may appear. This is because they are chosen for a particular purposc and reflect the value systems of the researcher. Do any of the three examples cited above really indicate a need for improved information provision? Linked to this, they fail to take account of the perceptions of need by the local people themselves. They cannot show the relative importance of different needs, nor, indeed, whether local people feel that the lack of literacy skills, for example, is a need at all. In addition, on their own, such indicators cannot show the extent to which the needs are being met. There may, for example, be a well organised programme of

environmental health in progress and a very rapid improvement in the proportion of households with pit latrines. Finally experience in industrialised countries suggests that widespread use of social indicators can lead to stereotyping. Areas or communities become labelled as 'deprived' or 'problem', and this can have adverse effects on them.

Nearly all projects looking at the needs for community information services have used social indicators to some extent, but they have been supplemented by information gathered in other ways(2,3,4, 36,63,67,68).

Survey of community leaders and existing information providers

Interviews with key people in the community - community leaders and information providers - have been found to be another relatively easy way of collecting details of unmet information need(4,30,63,67,68). Such people should be in a good position to identify unmet needs and will, in any case, have been contacted as part of building up the community profile. These interviews can be informal or part of a more formal research programme(30,63, 67,68). Where levels of literacy permit, the information has even been collected by a self-completed questionnaire(5). This would undoubtedly be cheaper, but in the longer term personal contact from the outset will bring far greater advantages. (Further details of how to carry out surveys are given on pages 29 to 40).

In general, the information to be collected is much the same as that gathered for the community profile. In addition to the management, objectives and availability of the service, it includes:

* the subjects covered;

* the formats in which information is provided;

* the number of people provided with information;

* whether information flow is two-way;

* where they got their own information.

(See pages 21 to 24 for further details)

It will also be useful to ask the interviewees for their views of the gaps in information provision within the community. These replies will need to be treated with some caution since people will quite naturally be concerned to protect their own interests.

Two earlier studies(30,67) assessed the needs for information through interviews with existing information providers and community leaders and compared these with the perceived needs of villagers themselves. Both concluded that there is a considerable gap between the two. This applied to farmers in Sri Lanka:

> Even more disconcerting than the ignorance of the villagers, was the total unawareness of the part of the information providers about the extent of the ignorance of these consumers and also of their everyday problems(30)

and to villagers in Papua New Guinea:

> The village perceptions on information need showed that a considerable gap exists between government perceptions and those of village people on many matters besides information needs(67).

There seem to be two reasons for this. Information providers and community leaders are drawn from a different section of the community. They are often highly educated, have more influence and are generally more privileged in terms of income and material provisions. Consequently they are remote from the ordinary villager who lacks these advantages. The second reason is that people face difficulties in their life with a degree of fatalism. High infant mortality is accepted as a fact of life, not something that can be overcome by knowledge of nutrition and health care.

it is, therefore, generally advisable to assess the needs for information from both standpoints. Indeed these are the reasons why a participatory approach has been advocated by researchers in other disciplines (16,22,75).

Community survey

Assessing needs from the perspective of potential users is far from easy, or straightforward. There are several ways of approaching the problem each with its own advantages and disadvantages. The main ways used by others are summarised below:

* *Perceived needs*, where people are asked what they, themselves, perceive to be their main areas of need for information. This was the approach taken by Temu in two Papuan villages(67,68) and by Coldevin(70). It is best approached by first allowing people to articulate for themselves what they consider to be their main needs, following this by a series of prompts asking people if they have needs in particular but broad subject areas, such as health, and then concluding by reconsidering which are the main needs.

It was found to be better to concentrate on needs in general, rather than information needs in particular, at least at the beginning of the interview or discussion(15, 67,68). In general people find it difficult to conceptualise needs for information.

The advantage of this approach is that it will ensure that the service reflects the priorities of local people themselves. This is important given the criticisms that, in the past, libraries have been unresponsive to community needs and have, therefore, developed services that are irrelevant to large sections of the population.

The main disadvantage is that rural people may have very real needs but they are unaware that there may be a solution(30,67).

* *Actual needs*, here people are asked whether they have actually needed information over a specified period. These periods of time vary from one research study to another and include anything from one month to one year. This approach is by far the most common in studies in Europe and North America(7,8,12, 13,14,18,59,70). It has been found that use of the word 'information' tended to limit the respondent's view of what the researchers were interested in. Instead the researchers asked respondents whether they '...needed to find the answer to a question, solve a problem or make a decision in two important situations'(12). The concentration on actual rather than perceived needs is often felt to give a better indication of the areas in which people would in reality seek information. The main disadvantage is that, if the timescale is too short, say within the last month, too few needs will be identified, whereas if the period is lengthened, to say a year, people find it difficult to remember the details the

researcher requires.

* *Hypothetical needs*, here people are asked what they would do if they needed information either about a particular subject, or in specific hypothetical situations. This approach has been used in a general survey in Jamaica which asked people where they thought information or help could be sought on particular subjects(64). It has also been used in an assessment of the information needs of the urban poor in the United States(18) and in a study in Great Britain(60). In both these cases respondents were presented with hypothetical situations and asked where they would seek information and help. This approach is less appropriate than either of the two previous ones, because of the difficulty people have in responding to a hypothetical situation and also because actual behaviour patterns frequently do not match those which people say they would take.

* *Use of existing information services* -

* *Views of existing information services* - these two approaches are discussed together because of their similarity. Rarely are they used alone, although there are two examples, both of the use of agricultural information by farmers - one in Ibadan, Nigeria(5) the other in Malawi(48). More usually they are used in conjunction with other approaches. In Papua new Guinea the use of existing services was reviewed alongside perceived needs(67,68). In Sri Lanka views of existing services were reviewed as part of a study approaching needs in a number of different ways(30). Studies in the United States(8,12,13,18) and Great Britain(59,70) have combined actual use of services with a study of actual needs over a specified time period.

* *Preferred ways of meeting needs* - here respondents are asked to indicate which would be their preferred method of acquiring information to meet either a perceived need(15) or an actual one(30). This has the advantage that responses are not restricted to the services actually provided, but the approach is limited by the fact that people find it difficult to conceptualise services that are outside their experience. An additional advantage of this approach is that it is the one most likely to identify ways of building upon existing, informal methods of acquiring and exchanging information.

Regardless of the approach taken there are three main research methods that are appropriate to a community survey: self-completed questionnaires, interviews and group discussions. However before deciding on either the most appropriate research method or the approach to be taken, other research experience suggests that it is valuable to begin with informal discussion meetings with local people(16,22,75). This will ensure that the survey is designed from the outset with the needs of local people in mind. These meetings should start by encouraging people to talk about life in the village, gradually focusing with any one group. It is important, even at this stage, to ensure that contact is made with all the main groups in the community. That is with women as well as men, with members of all ethnic, tribal or caste groups, with people who are farmers as well as people who do administrative, commercial or industrial work.

Self completed questionnaires

Questionnaire surveys are the most commonly used research method, but are least likely to be of value in rural communities where literacy levels will be low. For the sake of completeness information on questionnaire surveys has been drawn from texts on

research in general, and a list of further reading is given on pages 44 to 45.

The first points of importance are that the questionnaire should be as short as possible and should reflect the users' point of view not the researchers'(35,43). This is particularly important in determining both the order of the questions and their linking together. It is also important to keep the order of the questions as simple as possible with, ideally, all respondents being required to answer each question in turn. Avoid instructions like:

Do you belong to the weaving cooperative	Yes	☐
	No	☐
If you have replied 'No' please go straight to question 20. Do not answer questions 11-19.		

In general self-completed questionnaires should also include straightforward questions. Where possible these should be of the fixed type - that is the respondent is asked a question and is required to answer by choosing between a number of alternatives by ticking the appropriate box(43). For example:

In which age group are you?	Under 15 years	☐
	16-25 years	☐
	26-45 years	☐
	46-59 years	☐
	Over 60 years	☐

The other main type of question is the open question, where the respondent is left a black space into which the answer is written.

Please could you give brief details of the information which you were given by the agricultural extension worker.

Such questions are much more difficult to analyse than closed ones, but are often used where it is not possible to predict in advance the range of likely responses or when the question calls for an opinion or attitude. They are also of value when a questionnaire is first designed and tested as a way of identifying the categories for the design of closed questions in the final questionnaire(35,43).

The language used in the questions should be simple and unambiguous. This point is dealt with more fully under Interview surveys below(43).

Finally the overall design of the questionnaire should also be kept simple. The positioning of response boxes should be standardised - usually beneath one another on the right-hand margin. White space should be used to separate questions, and a different typeface to distinguish instructions from questions(43).

Think through from the outset how the questionnaire replies will be analysed and how they will be used(43).

The administration of the questionnaire also requires careful consideration. There are four main stages in addition to preparation and analysis - pre-testing, pilot testing, distribution and chasing. Pre-testing is done at an early stage and usually involves asking a small number of people to complete the questionnaire and comment critically on it. The second draft can then be used for the pilot testing, where the questionnaire is sent or given to a sample of people to ensure that it will produce the

information required without problems. Any minor redrafting is done after this stage(35,43).

The questionnaire should then be distributed with a personal letter, if possible, explaining the purpose of the study, its sponsorship and how the respondent came to be chosen and stressing that the replies will be both anonymous and confidential. It should also give a date and address for the return of the questionnaire and a stamped addressed envelope enclosed(35,43).

Once the return date is passed it is customary to send two reminder letters several weeks apart. The second of these should be accompanied by another copy of the questionnaire(35,43).

The other major point to consider is sampling, which will depend upon the purpose of the survey. If you require statistically reliable and generalisable data - for example the proportion of the population requiring agricultural information - then a random or probability sample will be needed. In such a sample everyone in the community has an equal chance of being included, and, if the sample is sufficiently large, the replies should be representative of the population as a whole. Details of drawing such samples are beyond the scope of this report and you are recommended to consult a statistician for help. Where such precision is not required a purposeful or opportunity sample can be used, where people are selected from different groups in the community in order to cover a wide range of community needs(43,46).

The main advantages of self-completed questionnaires are that they are cheap, can be used to survey a large number of people and if the questions are designed carefully there should be little scope for bias to be introduced by the researcher. In contrast their disadvantages are that they will be alien to many cultures; they rely on high levels of literacy skills; the lack of qualitative

depth to the answers, and that the level of response is likely to be low - so introducing a possible bias to the results(43).

Interviews

Interviews are, without doubt, the most widely used research technique for analysing information needs in both developing(3,5, 30,36,48,63,64,67,68,70) and industrialised countries(7,8,12,13, 14,18,19,55,59,60,70,71). Such interviews vary between two extremes, known as structured and unstructured interviews. In practice most surveys come somewhere between these extremes. At its most structured an interview survey would consist of an interviewer reading questions directly from a questionnaire, recording the replies by ticking the appropriate boxes. At the other extreme the interviewer will have a list of topics to be covered and will cover these in the order most appropriate to the person being interviewed. Such interviews require a high degree of skill since the interviewer must encourage and control a flow of information, yet do so with the minimum biasing effect. They are also very demanding and exhausting for the interviewer.

The decision on the degree of structure of the interview will, again, depend on the extent to which quantifiable and generalisable results are required. If general conclusions need to be draw about the population as a whole the interview questionnaire, or schedule as it is more commonly known, will need to be highly structured, with a maximum of closed questions and administered to a random sample of the population. The interviewers will need training in how each question is to be asked and how to record replies, especially where they need to be assigned to categories.

Where the requirement is not for statistical validity but for a detailed understanding of the range and type of needs a less

structured approach is more appropriate. Two researchers have also noted that the use of highly structured interviews may be inappropriate to rural communities. Here there are cultural factors that may make it difficult or near impossible to get a complete picture through the use of such interviews. Writing in the context of Nigeria, Aboyade writes:

> For one thing, people in the rural area are not generally as exposed to surveys as the urban people. And when we also consider that giving information through questionnaires is not as readily acceptable in the Nigerian type of society as compared to, say, the western cultures, the situation is doubly compounded.
>
> Furthermore in an underdeveloped society, people, especially the less sophisticated uneducated people, tend to give the type of reply they feel the questionnaire will want to receive. This is however, not always to be interpreted as being deliberately dishonest. It may simply be out of a wish to be courteous. If one was not too sure that his opinion would be found agreeable, one could give an innocuous answer that one senses would be agreeable to the questioner. There are also certain types of questions to which one does not expect to get the correct answers in most parts of the country - like asking how many children one has. It is just not done to count one's children or wives and name the correct numbers. The belief is that one may be unwittingly inviting some evil forces to take note and attempt reducing the numbers(3).

While Temu, records similar difficulties in the context of Papua New Guinea.

Several difficulties were encountered in using a questionnaire as a basis for the household interviews and discussions. The major difficulties were:

* the lack of familiarity of the villagers with questionnaires, which are an alien concept and practice;

* the need to translate the original questions into the vernacular of the villagers; the Kapari dialect differs markedly from that of Viriolo;

* the necessity of observing social conventions operating in the two villages (eg. partaking of food, the niceties of address and decorum), while administering the questionnaire; delay and circumlocution were inevitable;

* the varying levels of understanding of meaning and intent of individual questions, despite their being explained in the respondent's language and dialect. The interview process itself sometimes provoked puzzlement or suspicion;

* the lack of reading and writing facility of many villagers necessitating an oral presentation.

The interviews were conducted in the Kapari or Viriolo dialects as appropriate. They took place mainly in the evenings, a time traditionally busy with inter-household visiting, when betelnut and tea are shared over gossip, jokes and serious discussion. During most interviews the entire household was present. The head of the household (traditionally always an adult male) was the main respondent but comments were frequently added by some other adult or teenage members of the family(68).

This last point was also experienced by Simmons in her interview survey in a Zimbabwean village. The notion of a 'pure research interview' has little place in the context of village life!(33).

There may, then, be little choice but to use an unstructured approach. In such cases the interviewer will have a checklist of questions to be covered and must make every effort to set up a rapport with respondents while avoiding introducing bias by maintaining neutrality in relation to the content of what they person is saying. The skill is to show interest in what they are saying, without becoming personally involved or talking about yourself.

A decision also needs to be taken about how the replies are to be recorded if an unstructured approach is to be used. The real value often lies in having quotes that can be used in a report. In such cases there is really no effective substitute to tape recording. Manual note taking is unlikely to extend much beyond recording a summary of what was said. This poses the difficulty of inaccuracies and misinterpretation unless the notes are checked with the respondent. Tape recorders do, however, have their disadvantages. Firstly the equipment can, and does, break down. It is important therefore to use good quality equipment and tapes and to be quite familiar with the best way to get the clearest recordings. Secondly there is the effect that tape recorders can have upon the person being interviewed. Whether this will be greater or less than the effect of note taking will depend on the people being interviewed and should be tested before the research is carried out(43).

Analysing unstructured interviews can also be daunting. Having an entire tape transcribed can be costly and many people prefer to make notes from the tapes. The analysis should begin with indexing

and labelling the transcripts or notes or by organising them into files on different topics. Once organised in this way it is possible to begin to identify problems and themes from the data. Checking your interpretations (known as validation or verification) can be achieved by looking for rival explanations, and checking for cases that do not support your interpretation. using interviews alongside other research techniques can also be useful(6,43).

The main advantages of interview surveys, then, are that they can provide a detailed understanding of needs and will give a much higher response rate than a self completed questionnaire. They have clear advantages where literacy levels are low.

The main disadvantage of interview surveys is their cost - they require significant amounts of time on the part of the researchers and this is expensive. This means that the technique is seldom used in cases where generalisable results are required from a large sample of people. Interview surveys are most effective when what is needed is a qualitative survey of a small number of people. In such cases unstructured interviews can be most effective although these require a good deal of skill to conduct and to analyse.

Group discussions

Group discussions are another way of gathering the same type of information as the unstructured interview. They were used in the research in Papua New Guinea(61,68) and are planned for the research in Botswana and Malawi(36).

With this technique a small group of people (six to eight people is the optimum number) meet to discuss specific topics in a relatively structured way. The researchers role is to introduce each new topic in turn and, to ensure that each person contributes

to the discussion and to control and stimulate the flow of information. Again it is important to set up a rapport without introducing bias.

Action research

The final technique for analysing community needs is known as action research. This involves obtaining a broad idea of needs through a community profile, informal discussions or a small number of interviews, and then establishing a service that is flexible enough to be adapted to meet newly identified needs. These will be identified through detailed monitoring and evaluation as described on pages 56 to 75.

This was the approach employed, with some success in Badeku in Nigeria. By monitoring user reactions and demands to the service the researchers identified needs for a service which was different from that originally established(3).

Provided a participatory approach is adopted throughout the development of the service, action research can be a valuable way of refining the analysis of needs(43).

Combining research techniques

Rarely are these various techniques used alone. Each has its strengths and weaknesses and a combination of techniques is most likely to provide the information required. Of equal importance is striking a balance between employing a participatory approach and using accepted research methods which provide objective results. Research on the agricultural extension service in Ethiopia addresses this point in some detail(75).

The analysis of villagers information needs in two Papuan villages, for example, involved a community profile, interviews with existing information providers and both interviews and group discussions with villagers themselves(67,68).

In contrast, the research in Badeku, Nigeria combined a community profile using observation as well as published statistics and reports, interviews with villagers and action research(2,3,4).

Some general guidelines worth following when designing a research study are:

* involve local people from all groups in the community at all stages;

* borrow techniques from other research studies and learn from their mistakes;

* keep things simple and straightforward, use research methods which are themselves uncomplicated and which are within the competence of the people undertaking the research;

* do not collect too much information, restrict it to what is really needed. A simple study fully analysed and interpreted is worth far more than one that collects complex data that cannot be analysed;

* bring in research experts where necessary - to give advice on appropriate research methods, provide basic training, assist during the project itself or to help with the analysis of the results;

* be aware of the distortion that research can create. This is particularly important in communities where research is an alien concept(16,22,43,75).

Interpreting the findings

Having collected and analysed data using a combination of approaches some clear findings should begin to emerge. The analysis of community needs should have provided details of:

* the range of information needed by different groups of the community and the priorities assigned to those needs;

* the existing formal providers of information and the extent to which they meet the identified needs;

* the main informal methods by which information is obtained and exchanged within the community;

* the various factors that will have a direct bearing on the design of a new information service, for example, education and literacy levels; languages spoken; the periods in the day when people will be free to use the service, where people normally meet socially; the availability of transport, electricity and methods of communication.

It is likely, however, that findings from different approaches will be contradictory. it has already been noted that, in two studies, the needs identified by information providers and community leaders did not match the needs perceived by the villagers themselves(30,67,68). It is also possible that the significance or implications of some of the findings may not be immediately obvious to the people doing the research.

For these reasons it is generally recommended that the results should be discussed with the people who provided the information - those who were interviewed, took part in group discussions or, in action research, those who used the service established. This is part of the process of maintaining participation by local people, so smoothing the way for the establishment of the service. it also has advantages in straight research terms by assisting with more detailed interpretation of the findings(16,22,75).

It should be possible at the end of this process to have a clear idea of the main groups in the community who have needs for information, and the subjects and nature of those needs. It should also be clear how the library can work alongside and build upon the work of existing information providers. Indeed one possible conclusion is that existing information providers already have adequate means of disseminating information to the local people and what is needed is a resource centre to supply them with appropriate information resources for their work.

Further reading

Profiling the community

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V Palmour and others. *A planning process for public libraries.* American Library Association, 1980. (Note: the revised edition of this report, *Planning and role setting for public libraries*, does not cover the same level of detail on community profiling).

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J Martyn and F W Lancaster. *Investigative methods in library and information science: an introduction.* Arlington, Virginia, Information Resources Press, 1981.

N Moore. *How to do research.* 2nd edition, London, The Library Association, 1987.

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W Fernandes and R Tandon. *Participatory research and evaluation: experiments in research as a process of liberation.* New Delhi, Indian Social Institute, 1981.

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ESTABLISHING APPROPRIATE SERVICES

The existing literature provides some very clear guidelines on the types of community information services needed in rural areas.

The community development approach

One of the most important points is that effective services cannot be imposed on local communities, they must be set up from within them. This is a golden rule of community development(16,22) and has been identified by many as the reasons why libraries have by and large failed to meet the needs of rural people(17,24,26,28, 31,33,37,39,45,52,58,67,68,69). In other words, a community information service cannot be set up according to a pre-determined blueprint but should be

> ... created from the expressed requirements at the grass root level and the characteristics and unique features of a rural community should play an active part in determining how it functions(39).

It has been suggested on the basis of research and experience in Papua New Guinea(67,68) and Tanzania(39) that the most appropriate way of achieving this would be through District Information Officers who have a community development role. Further, it has

been proposed that the service should be set up in conjunction with a Board of management drawn from the community(24,39,67,68).

Building on existing services

It is clear that any new service should build upon and work closely with the existing information providers(2,3,4,30,33, 67,68). It has already been noted that analysis of community needs may indicate that the main requirement is for an information service or resource centre that concentrates on meeting the needs of extension workers, leaving them to provide the service direct to the rural people.

A multi-format approach to information materials

An information service intended for direct use by rural people cannot be based on printed materials. There are a number of reasons for this. Most people, when they need information, seek it through informal oral means(2,28,30,39,52,64,67,68). For an information service to be successful it should build on the traditional patterns of information seeking.

More compelling, perhaps, is the very high levels of illiteracy in rural areas: as high as 90 per cent in some areas(58). In a speech on International Literacy Day in 1982, the Director General of Unesco reported that there were 156 million illiterate people in Africa - 60.3 per cent of the adult population(10). Practical experience and research in rural areas confirms that the vast majority of potential users of community information services will be illiterate(3,39,67,68). Others will be unable to use printed materials because they are not available in the vernacular languages. In parts of Africa this problem is especially acute.

English and French are the two most widely used languages of government, but cannot be read by 95 per cent of the population. At the same time 600 of the 1200 local languages do not exist in writing and probably have not been transcribed(10).

Thirdly, even for those people who are literate appropriate material is frequently not available(2,5,10,30,33,42,61). The content usually reflects the concerns of 'experts' from outside the rural area and is often written at too high a level. A small scale investigation of the level of comprehension of a government leaflet by Sri Lankan farmers, who had a higher than average level of education showed few were able to understand it(30). At the same time there is a great deal of traditional information, accumulated by centuries of experience and handed on from one generation to the next by work of mouth(2,33,42). Rarely is this recorded in print:

> There is a great deal of native information which is not recorded or even considered and left aside despite its tremendous potential. Knowledge has to be warranted by academics and the real knowledge people have accumulated by living and doing, generation after generation, often in terrible conditions, is only regarded with contempt. As an African friend told us 'They come and show a film to my father on the way he has to grow potatoes, what we are doing for centuries and what they never tried'(42).

For these reasons the information that will be of greatest use will be posters and charts, photographs, slides, films, audio tapes and realia. Where printed materials are used they will be quite local in their application and presented in the local languages and dialect(3,5,24,29,33,34,39,61,72). Others have suggested using traditional forms of communications, for example, folk theatre, folk songs and puppets. These methods have been used successfully

in Indian, Hawaii, Botswana and China(29,34). More importantly most of the information will need to be given orally by the information workers themselves(3).

The need for active information workers

All the evidence suggests that workers will need to adopt an active approach to providing information. This is in contrast to the traditional role of the librarian whose main function is to assist users visiting the library to make maximum use of the literature it holds.

It means that the information workers must understand the information that they are handling(2) and be able to interpret and apply the information to a users' situation(1,2). It also requires them to be able to repackage information from government and non government bodies into formats that are more appropriate to villagers' needs(2,3,5,24,29,33,34,39). Of equal importance is for the information workers to set up a programme of recording traditional knowledge(33,39).

As an example, the range of services provided by the action research project in Badeku, Nigeria included:

* an information service;

* reading printed materials on request for those unable to read;

* translating into local languages, materials written in English;

* recording radio programmes on farming and health care, and providing listening facilities both for the recordings and the radio itself;

* organising discussions around particular problems in the village;

* providing an opportunity for villagers to chat and exchange information in a relaxed atmosphere;

* providing an outlet for people to express their frustrations over unfulfilled functions and their dissatisfaction with government workers(3).

A group of four resource centres, working with AHRTAG (Appropriate Health Resources and Technologies Action Group) have repackaged information into a very wide range of formats. These have included recorded cassettes using songs and dialogue, interviews, questions and answers; slides; booklets; flannelgraphs; models of latrines and charts showing food processing techniques(23).

Setting up a two way information service

Experience shows that community information services should be two-way. That is, they should act as a channel from, as well as to, the local community(3,23,29,34,67,68). It is insufficient to set up a service which provides a local community with information on government programmes and policies or practical information on matters such as farming techniques. Local communities should also be able to feed information back on how those policies work in practice, on areas of need not being met by existing policies or on how easily and successfully the practical information can be applied(75). The action research project in Badeku, Nigeria found

that there was a great need for such a service even though the researchers had not envisaged the need at the outset(3). Community information services in industrialised countries have identified the same need(28).

Planning and designing the service

The next stage is to begin planning and designing the community information service within these overall guidelines. It is at this point that direct involvement of local people is especially important. Again the use of informal discussion groups is particularly recommended(16,22). Where a Board of Management has been established they should play a central role in these discussions.

The overall aim should be to specify the objectives of the service in concrete operational terms. These should include:

* the groups in the community that will be served by the information service. Will it concentrate on providing information to support existing extension and village workers? Or will it meet the information needs of the community directly? If the latter, are there some groups within the community who will be a priority for the service?

* the subject areas on which information will be provided;

* the relationship with other existing information providers. This should always be complementary, with the proposed new service building on the strengths and filling in the gaps of existing provision;

* the style of work of the service. Is an information centre needed or would outreach information workers be more appropriate? Which are the most appropriate methods of providing information? - one to one enquiry service, group discussions, use of traditional media for example. What role will printed materials play in the work of the service? Will information materials need to be repackaged for local use?

* the extent of work other than providing information to the local community. For example, will the service provide detailed help and assistance to local people who are unable to use information alone? What emphasis will be placed on feeding information back from the community to government and other policy makers?

In addition to these overall objectives decisions will need to be taken on practical issues like who will manage the service, will it need premises, during which hours should it be available, what type of staff will it need, what information materials and training will the staff require(51).

Learning from others

Once decisions on these areas have been taken a clear picture should emerge on the type of service that should be provided. It is at this stage that it is particularly valuable to learn from the practical experiences of others who have established a service similar to the one planned.

The most detailed guidelines currently available are based on practical experience gained in setting up a community resource centre in Papua New Guinea.

> Shirley Giggey. *Rural community resource centres: a guide for developing countries.* Macmillan, 1988.

These are prepared for use by people who have little practical experience of providing library and information services - community development workers, village information workers or even villagers themselves. They are based on the concept that the centre is a forum for information exchange within a community.

Practical advice is offered on all aspects of setting up a centre, including topics like setting up a planning group or committee; setting objectives; financial topics such as the budget, fund raising, setting up a bank account and auditing; choosing the staff and providing a building for the centre. This advice would be equally relevant to any autonomous information service whatever its objectives.

The second main section - Operating a centre: the day to day tasks - offers basic practical information on establishing and running a resource centre. This includes topics like selecting and acquiring materials, producing your own materials and organising and recording materials, as well as 'general tasks' such as keeping statistics of use, recording materials issued on loan, insurance and general maintenance and repair of the centre.

Part three of the guidelines is a set of appendices giving further information such as a draft constitution, sample form letters for requesting publications lists or placing orders and simple methods of keeping records of materials held and of those on loan.

The guidelines assume little prior knowledge of any of the topics covered and concentrate on offering basic, practical information that could be used by rural people with only elementary levels of education.

If, however, it has been decided that the main need in the community is for an oral information service designed for people without literacy skills, it would be more appropriate to draw on the experience gained in Ibadan, Nigeria. Here the Department of Library Studies of the university of Ibadan, has developed what they call a 'Library for Non-Literates'. There are a number of publications which set out the practical experience of this service. The main ones are:

> B Olabimpe Aboyade. Communications potentials of the library for non-literates - an experiment in providing information services in a rural setting. *Libri 34(3)* 1984, 243-262.

This article gives details of the preliminary work carried out to identify needs and build up local support for the service. It also contains information on the range of services that were found to be most appropriate to people without basic literacy skills and practical advice on how to provide a focal point for information exchange in a rural community.

> B Olabimpe Aboyade. Access to information in rural Nigeria. *International Library Review 17*, 1985, 165-181.

The emphasis of this article is on the role of an information centre in coordinating the wide range of agencies involved in information transfer in a rural community.

It may have been decided that the range of agencies providing information to the community is already so extensive that the prime

need is for a resource centre that supports their work, rather than for a public information centre. There is a third project that is exploring this area of work and, at the time of writing, is preparing a practical manual based on their experiences. This project involves four experimental resource centres - two in Africa, one in India and one on the West Bank - who are taking part in a pilot project that is being coordinated by AHRTAG - the Appropriate Health Resources and Technologies Action Group - based in London.

The manual should be available by summer 1990 and will cover acquiring materials and equipment, training staff, producing information materials for use by extension workers and sources of expert help for answering enquiries. The emphasis will be on providing a resource centre that acquires and uses published materials to meet the information needs of health care and community development staff themselves and to supply them with information that has been repackaged for use with the local community. This information includes non-print formats such as audiotapes, films, working models and other audiovisual materials(23).

A great deal of practical information and advice is available from each of these three main sources. It cannot, however, be a substitute for the gradual evolution of an information service that is supported by and appropriate to the needs of the local community.

MONITORING AND EVALUATING PERFORMANCE

When designing a new service it is important to decide, at the outset, how its performance will be measured. Only by measuring the performance of a service is it possible to ensure that the resources are being used to the greatest effect and that the service is meeting the needs of the community.

This has, traditionally, been an area that has been greatly neglected. Often the only statistics collected have related to the total numbers of users(44,45). Evaluation was considered a luxury, and designed not to improve current projects but to plan and improve future ones(65). Fortunately attitudes have changed and most people now recognise the need both for regular monitoring and evaluation of the service.

Very few rural community information services have been set up in developing countries. Consequently there is little published information which relates directly to the monitoring and evaluation of such services. Instead it has been necessary to draw on a small number of key documents which distil the experiences of monitoring and evaluating rural information services in developed countries, such as Great Britain and the United States, and to supplement these with research experience gained in rural communities in developing countries.

The basic principles of monitoring and evaluation

It is not easy to monitor and to evaluate the performance of rural community information services. Such services are usually trying to meet a range of different needs within the communities they serve and consequently simple measures such as the number of people visiting the service are of litle value.

What is required is a coordinated pattern of measurements which, when considered together, provide a more thorough picture of the way in which the service is making use of the resources available to it and the extent to which it is meeting needs within the community it serves. There are eight basic principles which should determine the pattern of measures to be adopted(45).

Performance monitoring and evaluation should be an integral part of the management process. Management should be a cyclical process which involves assessing the nature of needs within the community; establishing objectives in the light of those needs; developing services which will enable the objectives to be achieved; operating the services; monitoring their performance; revising objectives in the light of performance and changing needs, and so on. As such, monitoring and evaluation is an essential and integral part of the management process.

Monitoring and evaluation should also be a continuous process. Useful information will be obtained by a single measurement of the performance of a service. The value of that information will, however, increase greatly if the measurement is repeated at regular intervals. The monitoring and evaluation process, therefore, needs to be such that it can be operated easily and cheaply.

The measures used should relate performance to the needs of the community. When designing a monitoring and evaluation system it is important

to remember that the service exists only to meet the needs of the community. This means that the measures chosen should relate to community needs. It also means that the service should make regular attempts to find out what the needs of the community are.

The measures should assess performance within the limits set by the levels of resources available. Some people express the view that when attempting to monitor and evaluate performance it is misleading to consider the resources used by the service - the inputs. The measurement process should, it is argued, concentrate on the outputs or the quality and quantity of the service provided. To an extent this is a valid argument. It does, however, overlook the fact that the level of resources available to the service ultimately determines the potential level of performance which can be achieved.

It would be reasonable to expect, for example, that if the level of resources is increased the level of performance should also rise. More particularly, it is unreasonable to expect to achieve a high level of performance if only minimal levels of resources are provided for the purpose.

What the monitoring and evaluation process should attempt to do is to assess the quality and the extent of service provided within the limits set by the levels of resources available.

To this extent the monitoring and evaluation is concerned with the *efficiency* of the information service.

Performance should be monitored and evaluated in the context of the objectives of the service. It is almost impossible to evaluate a service's performance without having a clear understanding of the service's objectives. The objectives indicate what the service is attempting to achieve. In this way the objectives indicate which aspects of the service should be monitored. They also provide the essential

context within which the results of the evaluation need to be considered. Different aspects of the service will be given different levels of priority and it is necessary to take account of this.

Identifying exactly what the service's objectives are is an important part of the monitoring and evaluation process. Without a clear statement of objectives it is difficult to know what is to be monitored.

It is only by introducing the concept of objectives that it becomes possible to move from the measurement of *efficiency* to the measurement of *effectiveness*. In this context, *effectiveness* is defined as the extent to which the service is achieving its objectives.

Community information services provide an amalgamation of different services. It is impossible to think of community information services providing a single, unified service. In reality they provide a variety of different types of service each directed at a different client group. This range of different types of service needs to be recognised if effective measures are to be developed and applied. Different measures will be required, for example, to assess the performance of an enquiry service from those used to assess the work of a resource centre.

It is, therefore, necessary to identify the different types of service and to measure these separately. Together, the results will provide an overall picture of the service's performance.

The level of monitoring should be determined by the amount of detail required. For most purposes it will be sufficient to monitor the overall performance of the service. This general approach will provide a basis for broad comparisons and, perhaps more important, it will

not require a major effort to be expended in collecting information.

There will, however, be certain circumstances which require more detailed information, looking in some depth at the performance of the different activities which together make up the overall service. Such measurement will provide much more detailed information but will also require much more effort to be expended in its collection.

The best approach is to plan a simple, basic monitoring and evaluation system which can be operated easily by the staff without disrupting their work. This should provide enough information for most purposes. When necessary this basic system can be supplemented by a more detailed collection of information which provides the basis for a thorough eveluation(21,50).

Comparison is an essential aspect of performance monitoring and evaluation. A certain amount will be learned from a single measurement of a service's performance. The value of the information, however, will increase greatly if the service's performance is compared with the performance of other similar services. Equally, much can be learned by considering the performance of the service this year and comparing it with performance in previous years.

The element of comparison is, therefore, a crucial part of performance monitoring and evaluation. Because of this, it is necessary to take certain steps to ensure that like is compared with like.

Basic measures should be adapted to suit local circumstances. Each information service should reflect the particular needs of the community which it serves. As no two communities are exactly alike, so each information service will be unique. Accordingly, it is necessary

to adapt and to modify the monitoring and evaluation system to suit the particular local circumstances. Care should be taken, however, to avoid changing the measures used from one year to another as this will reduce the scope for making comparisons over time.

Monitoring the resources used

One way to measure the amount of resources used would simply be to calculate the annual expenditure on the service. This would not, however, produce a very useful figure. Fistly, such an overall figure gives no information about the ways in which the resources are allocated. Secondly, inflation makes it very difficult to compare expenditure from one year to another.

To overcome these problems it is necessary to monitor what those financial resources are used for. Broadly this means concentrating on the staff, the information resources, the premises and the equipment used.

Measuring the overall levels of resources used under these headings is of limited value. The amount of resources available should be related to the size of the community which is being served. In most cases, therefore, it is necessary to express the levels of resources used in relation to the number of people who live in the community.

In many cases it is not very easy to identify the community served by the information service. If the service has been established to meet the needs of a relatively isolated village, then the village represents the community served and all that is required is to obtain the figure for the number of people living in the village. Complications can arise in a number of ways: the village may not have a clear boundary; there may be small outlying

communities which could be expected to make use of the service, or there may be a significant variation in the size of the community from one season to another.

There are no hard and fast rules for calculating the size of the community served by a rural community information service. It is necessary to adopt a pragmatic approach and to reach a general agreement on the size and shape of the community served and on the number of people who live within that community. The important thing is to be reasonable and to accept that people will not travel very far to visit a service, even in rural areas where people are used to having to travel long distances.

Having established how many people live in the community it becomes possible to express the levels of resources used in relation to that number. One way to do this is to divide the level of resources by the population served to give a figure 'per head of population'. This approach, however, frequently results in very small values and it is therefore more useful to express the level of resources 'per thousand population'.

Staff. Information services are very labour-intensive and the most important resource is likely to be the staff. The number of staff who work for the service should be monitored from year to year. Other information should also be collected about the staff. It may be important to know how many have received training in information work, or how many of them can speak all the languages used within the community. It may also be important to monitor the extent to which the staff reflect the composition of the community in terms of age, gender, ethnic characteristics and so on.

Information resources. The main question which the monitoring is seeking to answer is 'does the service have sufficient funds to acquire all the information it needs?' It may also be necessary

to question whether or not suitable information materials are available and whether or not the service has the funds and experience needed to create information materials that are appropriate to the community.

Premises and equipment. Here the main question is whether the premises are large enough and appropriately equipped for the range of services which are being provided. It is also important to assess the extent to which they are in the best possible location. It is no good having a large, well-equipped building if it is located somewhere inaccessible, or if it is only open for a very limited number of hours each week.

Monitoring the performance of the service

Having measured the resources which are being used by the service, it becomes possible to turn to the output or the performance of the service. It is important to stress that there are many aspects of the service which can be monitored and the final choice of indicators will depend upon the objectives of the service and its style of work. The following range of possibilities has been identified for community information services in Great Britain(51).

The range of enquiries. There is clear evidence from research studies that people use information services selectively(51). In other words, they will use a service mainly for enquiries they know it to be capable of answering. Consequently, the range of enquiries received by a community information service can be an indicator of its 'image' in the eye of the community. If it differs greatly from the range expected, if the numbers of enquiries in different categories has varied greatly from previous years, or if the number and range is greatly different from other similar services, then explanations will need to be sought.

The level of enquiries. A failure to achieve the anticipated levels of use could be a reflection of many possible factors. These could include insufficient staff or staff who are not adequately trained and experienced to offer the level of service expected by the community; an inappropriate range of services for the needs in the community; inappropriate or inadequate hours of availability; restricted access due to the use of poorly sited premises.

The number of people returning with a second enquiry, or recommending the service to others. Most information services find that they become known in their community by word of mouth and personal recommendation. Monitoring what prompted users to contact the service will show how many people were satisfied enough either to return for information subsequently or to recommend it to others.

The types of user. Monitoring the characteristics of users can be a sensitive issue, but, depending on local circumstances, it might include age, gender, marital status, first language, ethnic or caste group and employment status. If the actual levels of use by different groups vary from those expected or intended then some explanation may need to be sought. It might mean that the staff deter certain groups because of age, gender, ethnic, language or social class differences. The atmosphere and philosophy of the service may act as a barrier to use. The hours of availability or choice of premises may prevent use by some groups. Finally the range of services offered may be inappropriate for particular sections of the community.

Detailed help and assistance. In addition to recording overall levels of use it is helpful to keep separate records of short factual enquiries and those that require detailed help and assistance. Services that aim to provide such in-depth help should calculate

the proportion of the overall enquiries where detailed assistance was given.

Where the provision of detailed help and assistance is one of the prime functions of the service, then detailed monitoring should also be undertaken of the range of subjects, and type of user.

Information feedback. The extent and range of this work should be recorded, including feedback on the impact and practical experience of government legislation and administration as well as of specific programmes of work in the local community. It will also include reporting any unexpected trends arising from the regular monitoring of the use of the service.

The work actually undertaken can be assessed against any changes in policy or new legislation introduced; new programmes or changes to existing programmes of work of government agencies within the rural community or any policy discussion documents published by government agencies during the year.

Resource centre work. Where the objective of the service include providing a resource centre for other information providers, performance can be assessed by keeping statistics on the overall levels of use by each of the agencies it aims to serve. In this way it will be possible to assess which make heavy use of the service, and, more importantly, which make little or no use. Similarly, the range of enquiries should be analysed to assess how the service is perceived by its users.

Information work with groups. For example providing information support to a women's agricultural cooperative. In such cases details should be recorded of the nature of the group, the number of people involved, the extent of the information support given to

the group and an estimate of the total number of people likely to have benefitted indirectly.

Repackaged information. This might include printed material translated into local dialects, the production of more appropriate printed information or information in other visual or audio formats, or the organisation of discussion groups. For each, statistics should be kept of the total number of people estimated to have been provided with information.

Each of these monitors one particular aspect of the work of the information service. In addition, it is valuable to look at the service as a whole. This might include monitoring both the proportion of staff time and the proportion of other resources spent on each of the objectives of the service and comparing this with the priorities assigned to those objectives. For example, if the main priority was to provide detailed help and assistance directly to the local population, yet 75 per cent of staff time was taken up with providing support to other information providers, some explanation would need to be sought(51).

As a measure of the efficiency of the service it may be appropriate to monitor the proportion of staff time spent actually providing information to users, as compared with that spent on office and other routines(51).

It is important to decide on the monitoring required at the outset of the service, and to build in systems to collect the required information. These systems should be kept as simple as possible. Failure to do so will result in disproportionate amounts of time being spent on recording only to produce more data than can be analysed(41,45,50,74).

Surveys

Monitoring and evaluating the service in this way will provide a good deal of information about the performance of the service. What will be missing, however, will be an assessment of how the service is regarded in the community. To collect this information it is necessary to conduct some surveys. A survey of the general community will show how the service is regarded by both users and non-users. Slightly different is a survey of the users themselves, while another approach is to survey the other information providers in the community. Each of these surveys will provide additional useful information for the evaluation.

Community survey

A community survey focuses on who does use the service and who does not(5,9,40,45,63,70). It will, therefore, look at the differing patterns of use by various groups in the community, women as compared with men, different ethnic groups, different age groups, or use by people who are literate as compared with those who are not.

The survey may go further and try to identify if non-users had needed information but used some other source. If they did, which source did they use, did they get the information required and why did they not use the community information service? Going beyond this, the survey may wish to probe non-users' attitudes to and perceptions of the community information service.

Similarly, the community survey may include more detailed questioning of users. For example, how many times have they used the service, what did they use it for, why did they choose to use it rather than another information source? Again, users' attitudes

to and perceptions of the service can be probed and the replies compared with those of non-users.

General guidance on community surveys is contained in the Unesco manual, *Measuring the performance of public libraries*(45). To this can be added experience of survey research in developing countries(3,5,15,30,36,48,63,64,67,68). In the majority of rural communities the most appropriate method of collecting this information will be by an interview survey(40,63). (See page 35 to 40 for further details). Only where literacy levels are uniformly high would a self-completed questionnaire be appropriate(5). (See pages 32 to 35). It may, however, be more appropriate to probe perceptions of and attitudes to the service through group discussions held separately for users and non-users (see page 40).

User survey

In contrast to the community survey, a survey of users tends to focus particularly on their satisfaction with the service, either in general or on one particular occasion(5,9,40,63). So, in addition to covering the same questions as would be asked in a community survey, it will include others specifically designed to assess levels of satisfaction(45).

It should be noted, however, that measuring satisfaction is never easy(45,51). It is likely that users will be quite unaccustomed to being asked for their views of services and so will find it hard to make a judgment. Secondly, they may have little prior experience of other information services against which to compare. Put crudely any service might be better than none, even if that service is not particularly good. Finally, user satisfaction is not always an indicator of the quality of the service, as many

other factors can have an influence. The most obvious of these is user expectation. If a user came to the service hoping to get confirmation of their own views - that a government loan was available to them, for example - they would not be satisfied with less. The staff may provide detailed and accurate information showing that the user is not entitled to a loan, but the user is unlikely to express satisfaction with the outcome.

However, bearing in mind these difficulties, it is important that some assessment of the service is made from the users' point of view. Many surveys have reduced this to one question asking whether the user was satisfied with the service. Such questions have little value, as experience shows that the vast majority of people always reply that they were! To get round the problem, the question of satisfaction needs to be broken down into a large number of more concrete aspects(45). Questions like:

- What help or information was sought from the information service?

- What help or information was given?

- Did they get all the information they required?

- Was it provided in an appropriate format, at the right level and in the right language?

- Were the staff helpful? Sympathetic?

- Would they use the service again?

- Would they recommend it to others?

- What other sources had been tried for the same information? How did they compare?

- If the service provides information in a number of ways (for example an enquiry service, providing detailed assistance, arranging discussion groups, repackaging information), which do they think is the most important? Which is the least important?

- How convenient was it to use the service, both in terms of its physical location and its hours of availability.

As with the community survey, this information is most likely to be gathered by personal interviews. (See pages 35 to 40). Where more structured interviews are used, it is important to provide a series of checklists for the replies(45). For example:

How convenient are the opening hours of this information service for you?

Very convenient	☐
Quite convenient	☐
Neither convenient nor inconvenient	☐
Quite inconvenient	☐
Very inconvenient	☐

Please say how you would like the opening hours changed.

....

Would you recommend the service to other people needing information?

Yes, definitely ☐

Yes, but with reservations ☐

No ☐

What are the reasons for your reply?

....

Group discussions, too, can be a useful way of assessing overall satisfaction with particular aspects of the service. They would, however, be less suitable for probing satisfaction with the information provided, but could cover in some detail areas like views on the range of services provided and their appropriateness to local needs(45,75).

Survey of information providers

A survey of other information providers within the community has also been used to assess the service(9,40,63,70). In this case the range of questions might include:

- Whether, in their view, the village requires a centre where information can be requested by the public.

- The type of role such they feel the information service should undertake, and whether that view has changed since the service was first planned.

- Any reservations or criticisms they may have of the service, and any changes in their attitudes since the service was planned.

- How the service provided relates to their own work.

- Suggestions for improvements or changes to the service.

Questionnaires (see pages 32 to 35), interviews (pages 35 to 40) and groups discussions (page 40) are all possible methods of gathering this information.

Other methods

The methods outlined above will be adequate for the majority of evaluations. There are other methods that have been used to evaluate information services, but these are less likely to be of value in assessing services in rural communities in developing countries. The two main ones are attitude testing and unobtrusive testing(45).

Attitude tests usually consist of a series of statements expressing favourable or unfavourable attitudes. Respondents are asked to indicate the extent to which they agree with these attitudes. There are a number of methods for constructing such tests, and of these they most commonly used are Likert Scales. In these respondents are shown a list of statements and asked to indicate the strength of their agreement on a five point scale ranging from agree strongly to disagree strongly. However, designing these scales is a skilled time-consuming task, and one that would need the assistance of someone with experience in the area. In view of the difficulties encountered with the use of structured interviews

in rural communities (see pages 36 to 38) it is unlikely that attitude tests could be used with great success in many areas.

Unobtrusive testing has been developed, primarily in North America, as a method of assessing reference and information services from the point of view of the user(11,45). The researcher poses as a user and asks the service for a specific piece of information. The information staff are unaware of the research and so respond as they would to an ordinary member of the public. In this way it is possible to assess the accuracy of factual replies as well as drawing more subjective assessments such as of the helpfulness of the staff. However, the choice of questions and the method of assessing responses can be complex. It is also doubtful whether, within a rural community, anonymity of the researcher would be possible.

Responsibility for the review of performance

It is important to recognise that when faced with a performance review, staff frequently feel challenged, and there is an understandable tendency to justify previous activity and to present a service's performance in the best possible light. This is compounded when the review takes place retrospectively, and is, primarily, intended as an aid to planning other future projects. It is made still worse when the review is carried out by external assessors(51,65).

It is important, therefore, that the staff are involved in designing both the monitoring and evaluation processes so that they provide them with a continuous flow of information about the efficiency and effectiveness of the service(51,65).

Equally, the community itself should be given the opportunity to contribute to decisions about the types of information that should be collected about the performance of the service. Ideally this should include both users and non-users(16,22,51,65,75).

Ultimately, however, responsibility for performance review should rest with the local management board of the services(51,65).

Interpreting the findings

Information from the monitoring and evaluation process should be constantly assessed and interpreted(44,45). If a participatory approach is being maintained then the findings should be presented to informal discussion groups involving ordinary members of the community as well as to the local management board and to the staff. The aim of these discussions should be to assess the extent to which the objectives of the service have been met, whether the original objectives are still appropriate and how the service might be improved in the light of experience(16,22,65,75).

Planning a community information service should be seen as a cyclical process which involves assessing the needs within the community; establishing objectives in the light of those needs; developing services which will enable the objectives to be realised; providing the services; monitoring and evaluating their performance; revising objectives in the light of performance and changed needs and so on(45). Involving staff, management and the local community in that process will help to ensure that the community information service is appropriate to local needs(51,65).

Further reading

Nick Moore. *Measuring the performance of public libraries*: a draft manual. Unesco. 1989 (PGI-89/WS/3).

Douglas Zweizig and Eleanor Rodger. *Output measures for public libraries.* Chicago, American Library Association, 1982.

Charles McClure and others. *Planning and role setting for public libraries: a manual of options and procedures.* Chicago, American Library Association, 1987.

SUMMARY OF GUIDELINES

The earlier chapters of this report have reviewed the literature and drawn from it general guidelines for establishing a rural community information service in a developing country. The purpose of this summary chapter is to bring together the main points. References are given to the relevant parts of the main report where more detailed information can be found.

It should be stressed that they are set out here as draft guidelines. The intention is that they will be tested and refined at the second and third stages of the IFLA project.

Introduction

At the beginning it is important to be clear about the scope and the intent of the guidelines. They are intended to assist librarians, community development workers, cultural officers and others who are trying to set up information services in rural areas. The aim of the services is to help people to deal with the problems which they face in the course of their daily lives and to participate in the development of their societies.

The underlying philosophy of these guidelines is that a participatory approach should be taken. That is, the local communities themselves should play an important part in analysing

their own needs, establishing the service and monitoring and evaluating its success.

The services which result from these guidelines should be appropriate to local needs and they should form an integral part of the community they serve. To achieve this it is necessary for the services to be developed by people who are:

* Known to the community and considered by that community to be appropriate people for the work.

* Chosen by the community, or who at least work with the acceptance of the community.

* Introduced to the community in ways which satisfy all the traditional and current political protocol requirements.

* Constantly present in the community providing help and attention.

It is important to stress these points. The services we are attempting to develop can only succeed if they grow up as part of the community and if they are owned by the community. This calls for sensitivity, commitment and identification on the part of the workers helping to establish the services.

Finally, it is worth making the point that these guidelines concentrate solely on the provision of information. The importance of traditional library services is not denied - it is simply outside the scope of the guidelines.

Analysing community needs

The first stage in the establishment of a rural community information service is a thorough analysis of the needs within the community. There is always a temptation to move quickly to the establishment of an actual service. It is important to resist this. If the service is to be successful, it is necessary to spend a considerable amount of time and effort working with the community to identify what their needs are.

The review of research has indicated that the nature of the information needed in rural areas varies from community to community and that in most cases people meet their information needs by talking to friends, neighbours and relatives. This does not provide sufficient detail to enable the service to be planned and it needs to be supplemented by the collection of detailed local information.

To collect the detailed information it is necessary to build up a picture of:

* The community to be served - the community profile

* The primary information providers in the community - the information providers' profile

* The information needs of people in the community and the extent to which they are being met - the information needs profile.

To collect the information for these profiles it is necessary to undertake some research. As with all the other stages in the development of the information service it is important to involve the community in the design and conduct of the research

The community profile (pages 14 to 21)

The aim of the community profile is to enable the project workers to get to know the community as a whole. The profile should cover the community's socioeconomic and political features, its culture and traditions, its leadership and power structure, its economic potential and how its resources are distributed and the nature of its local institutions and decision-making processes.

To achieve this it helps to divide the task into three parts:

* A description of the environment
* An analysis of the population
* An understanding of how people in the community spend their lives.

To collect information about the environment, or the context within which the community exists, it is worth starting by trying to identify and obtain copies of national or regional plans. Try also to identify national or regional agencies which may collect and store information about the community.

Try to identify and obtain relevant reports or surveys. Try also to arrange interviews with planners and administrators. Spend time talking to key people within the community.

All these sources of information will provide a picture of the community and the context within which it exists. They will, however, give an official or formal account of the situation. It is necessary to complement this with a view from the position of someone who is not in authority. To obtain this attend informal

meetings in the community; talk to ordinary people at their meeting places, at work and when they are at leisure. Try to see things through their eyes.

The section of the community profile which is concerned with the environment might contain information on the following topics: patterns of settlement and land use; the economics of the community and the nature of employment; transport and communications; utilities and services such as electricity, water and sewerage; facilities such as shopping, health services and leisure facilities, and local government and administration.

The next part of the community profile concerns the population in the community. To obtain this information, start with the most recent census, if one exists. This will provide the basic framework of information. It will be necessary to build on this framework, collecting more detailed information about the community in question. To do this try to identify reports and surveys which contain relevant information. These may have been produced by government departments, non-governmental agencies or community development organisations.

Try to collect information on the following topics: the size of the population; its ethnic composition; levels of education and, particularly, levels of literacy; health; income levels and the distribution of income; housing; employment, and the cultural background of the community.

The information about the community's environment and the analysis of the population will, however, provide only part of the picture. Experience shows that it is vitally important to get to know people in the community - to appreciate not only their physical circumstances and social and political environment, but their beliefs, traditions, values and psychological outlook, their life

style and the daily demands on their time and energy. What do they worry about if they cannot sleep at night?

Information of this kind can only be obtained slowly by getting to know the community and the people who live there. It will be necessary to make informal contact, to talk, to observe and above all else, to listen.

Developing a community profile could become a major task on its own, taking years to compile. It is important, therefore to keep the work in perspective. Be quite clear why you are collecting the information - it is to build up a basic picture of the numbers, lifestyle and needs of the people in the community and it will be used to design and to plan the development of the service. The secondary purpose of the process is every bit as important - it is to begin the process of participation by local people and to see needs through their eyes.

To make the task manageable, keep things simple and collect only the information which is essential. If more detail is needed it can be added later. Too much information will confuse rather than clarify the situation.

The information providers' profile (pages 21 to 24)

No information service exists in a vacuum. It is important to have a clear picture of existing information provision before any steps are taken to plan a new service. This should include both the formal channels for information provision and the informal traditional ways of information exchange.

It is perhaps easiest to start with the formal channels. These could include the information provided by government services, non-

governmental organisations, the mass media and traditional sources such as traditional courts or village elders.

Most of these should have been identified through the community profile. Establish contact with each of the information providers and arrange a meeting or an interview to gather information on the following aspects of the service:

* Who provides the money for, and manages the service?

* What is its prime objective?

* Is there a permanent office in the community or are visits made by extension workers?

* When is the service available?

* How many staff provide information and what training have they received?

* On which subjects do the staff give information?

* In which formats is the information provided?

* How many people do they provide information with each year?

* Is there a mechanism for feeding information back from local people as well as to them?

* Where do they get their own information from?

* What contact do they have with other information providers?

Interviews with traditional, or informal, information providers should focus on their role in the community, the people to whom they provide information, the subject matter and the format of the information and the method by which it is provided.

The information collected in the interviews and meetings should be supplemented by impressions of the services gained from discussions with individual members of the community.

The information needs profile (pages 24 to 40)

It is very difficult to assess people's need for information but an attempt to do so must be made if the community information service is to be relevant. The review of the literature indicates that there are many ways of attempting to assess information needs. It is possible, for example, to learn a considerable amount from the community profile and the profile of information providers.

The community profile will indicate areas of social need. Low levels of literacy, for example, suggest that there is a need for information about literacy programmes. Similarly, high levels of infant mortality could suggest that there is a need for information about health, nutrition and sanitation.

The information providers' profile will also indicate different needs for information. In the discussions with information providers a picture should have emerged of the gaps in information provision and of the areas where the information providers themselves feel that they are unable to meet all the needs with which they are faced.

While these two profiles can give much useful information they are unlikely to provide a full enough picture. There is no substitute for a community survey which sets out specifically to identify information needs.

When planning such a survey, it is necessary to be clear about the nature of the information needs which are being surveyed. It is possible to survey information needs in different ways by asking people about different types of information needs:

* Perceived needs. It is possible to learn a lot by simply asking people what information needs they think that they have. The best way to do this is to allow people to say what they consider to be their main needs and then to prompt them by asking about the information they need in particular subject areas such as health or education.

  The problem with perceived needs is that people are frequently unaware that they need information. This may be because they do not see that information can be used to solve a problem which they face - they may simply not appreciate that there is a solution to the problem.

* Actual needs. Another way to explore information needs is to ask people about the information which they have actually needed over the last month or year. Here it is worth noting that for many people 'information' is a rather vague concept and it is often more helpful to ask them whether they needed to find an answer to a question, solve a problem or to make a difficult decision.

  It is important to use a timescale which relevant to the experience of the people being surveyed. One month is quite a short time, and might exclude many information

needs. Equally a year may be a long time for some people unless the timescale can be related to something like a harvest or a wet season.

* Hypothetical needs. Here information needs are explored by asking people what they would do if they needed information about a particular problem or situation. This may give a good picture of the strengths and weaknesses of the existing information services.

  The problem with asking about hypothetical information needs is that it is necessary to select problems and situations with which people can identify. Even then, many people find it difficult to respond to a hypothetical situation.

* Existing information services. Much can be learned about information needs by asking people about the use they make of the existing information services and about their views of the services.

* Preferred ways of meeting needs. Finally it is possible to ask people how they would most like to satisfy a perceived or an actual need. This approach has the advantage that the responses are not restricted to the services which are already provided. The limitation is that people often find it difficult to think of or to describe services which are outside their experience.

  The main benefit of this approach is that it is the one which is most likely to identify ways of building upon existing informal methods of acquiring and exchanging information.

It is important to stress that these approaches are not mutually exclusive. Indeed, it would be sensible to use more than one in any survey to get the fullest possible picture.

There are three main research methods which can be used for a survey of community information needs: self-completed questionnaires; interviews, and group discussions. Before deciding upon which method to use, it is worth beginning with some informal discussions in the community to ensure that the survey approach adopted is best suited to the community.

These discussions should be held with each of the main groups in the community, taking care not to exclude anyone. Discussions should be held with women as well as with men, with members of all ethnic and caste groups, with farmers as well as commercial and industrial workers.

Having introduced the idea of a survey in this way and having gained the acceptance of the community, it is possible to begin the design of the survey. The first question to answer is which of the three research methods is to be used.

Self-completed questionnaire surveys are very common in developed countries, but they are likely to be of limited value in most rural communities in developing countries unless levels of literacy are very high.

If questionnaires of this kind are used they should be short and designed so that they are very easy to complete. Careful thought should be given to the sequence of questions and to the ways in which they are linked together. Ideally respondents should be required to answer each question in turn.

The questions themselves should be kept as simple as possible and should use words and language with which the people will be familiar. Questions should be of the closed type - that is, the respondent should be able to answer by choosing between a limited number of alternatives. Open questions, where the respondent is asked to write in an answer, are less likely to obtain a response and are much more difficult to analyse.

The success of the questionnaire will improve if it is carefully designed. It should look attractive and should encourage the respondent to spend the time necessary to complete it.

Self-completed questionnaires are administered in four stages. Having designed the questionnaire it is always worth pre-testing it with a small number of people who can suggest ways in which it can be improved. It is also worth pilot testing the revised version of the questionnaire. In a pilot test the questionnaire is sent to a small sample of respondents to check that it can be completed without difficulty and that it produces the information required.

Having pre- and pilot-tested the questionnaire the amended version can be administered. This is usually done by post with a personal covering letter which explains the purpose of the study, who is carrying out, what the results will be used for and stressing that the information supplied will remain confidential. The questionnaire should give a date and an address for the return of the form and a stamped addressed envelope should be enclosed.

Once the return date is passed it is usual to send reminder letters to those who have not returned the form.

The other major point to consider is sampling. If statistically reliable and generalisable data is required then a random or

probability sample will be needed. In such a sample everyone in the community has an equal chance of being included and, if the sample is sufficiently large, the replies should provide a true representation of the views of the community as a whole. Where such precision is not required a purposeful or opportunity sample can be used. In these samples people are selected from different groups in the community in order to cover a range of community needs.

The whole question of sampling is a complex one and there is insufficient space to deal with it satisfactorily here. It is strongly recommended that an experienced research worker or statistician is consulted about this aspect of the survey.

The main advantages of self-completed questionnaires are that they are cheap, they can be used to survey a large number of people and, if the questions are designed carefully, there should be little scope for bias. Against this, they are alien to many cultures, they rely on high levels of literacy and the response rate is likely to be low.

Interview surveys overcome many of the problems associated with questionnaires. In their most structured form, the interviewer simply reads out questions from a schedule which looks very much like a self-completed questionnaire and records the replies by ticking the appropriate responses. Other interview surveys are much less structured and the interviewer will simply have a list of topics to be covered. These are much more difficult to conduct as the interviewer must encourage and control the flow of information, yet do so without introducing any bias into the interview. They also have to record the responses as they go along.

In many rural communities firmly structured interviews are neither appropriate nor possible. In such cases it is necessary to use an unstructured approach and to avoid bias by attempting to retain a neutral stance. The skill lies in being able to show interest in what is being said without becoming personally involved.

A problem arises with recording the results of interview surveys. The interviewer can only write down a small proportion of what is said in the interview and in selecting and summarising the information recorded it is likely that some bias will be introduced. To overcome this many people use tape recorders. These have their own disadvantages. Fist, the equipment can, and does, break down. Secondly, tape recorders are not necessarily familiar to the people being interviewed and they may feel uncomfortable knowing that everything they say is being recorded.

Analysing unstructured interviews can be very difficult. It is seldom possible,or desirable, to have the complete tape recording transcribed. Instead it is necessary to listen to the tapes and to make notes which can then be analysed.

The main advantages of interview surveys are that they can provide a detailed understanding of needs and they will give a much higher response rate that self-completed questionnaires. They have clear advantages in communities where levels of literacy are low. The main disadvantage is cost. Interview surveys need a lot of time on the part of the researchers and this is always expensive.

Group discussions are another way of gathering the same type of information as the unstructured interview. With this technique, a small group of people - usually between six and eight - meet to discuss specific topics in a relatively structured way. The role of the researcher is to introduce each new topic in turn and to

ensure that everyone contributes to the discussion. It is also necessary to control and to stimulate the flow of the discussion.

Group discussions are good for getting a detailed understanding of a small number of issues. Each discussion should last less than an hour and it is seldom possible to cover more than three or four topics. The discussions should be recorded and analysed in the same way as unstructured interviews.

Each of the research approaches has its strengths and weaknesses and it is often worth using more than one. Interviews, for example, could identify a number of key issues which could be explored in greater detail in group discussions. When designing the survey it is worth following these general guidelines:

* Involve local people from all groups in the community at all stages.

* Borrow techniques from other research studies and learn from their mistakes.

* Keep things simple and straightforward. Use techniques which themselves are uncomplicated and which are within the competence of the people undertaking the research.

* Do not collect too much information, restrict it to what is really needed. A simple study fully analysed and interpreted is worth far more than one which collects complex data that cannot be analysed.

* Bring in research experts where necessary to give advice on the design of the study, to provide training, to help with the survey itself or to assist with the analysis of the results.

* Be aware of the distortion which the research itself can create. This is particularly important in communities where research itself is an alien concept.

Having conducted the community information survey a picture should have emerged which shows:

* The range of information needed by different groups in the community and the priorities which should be assigned to those needs.

* The existing formal providers of information and the extent to which they meet the identified needs.

* The main informal methods by which information is obtained and exchanged within the community.

* The different factors which will determine the design of the information service, such as the educational and literacy levels; the languages spoken; the periods in the day when people will be free to use the service; the most appropriate location for the service; the availability of transport and communications, and so on.

These results should be discussed with individuals and groups in the community. Not only does this provide an opportunity to check that the results, and the interpretation placed upon them, are valid, it also provides another opportunity to involve the community in the project and to reinforce their commitment to the eventual information service.

It should be possible at the end of this process to have a clear idea of the main groups in the community who have needs for

information and the subjects and the nature of those needs. It should also be clear how the proposed information service will need to work alongside and build upon the work of existing information providers. Indeed one possible conclusion is that existing information providers already have adequate means of disseminating information to the local people and what is needed is a resource centre to supply them with appropriate information resources for their work.

Establishing appropriate services (pages 46 to 55)

It is impossible to say in advance what the most appropriate service will be for any community. Each service should be designed to meet the particular needs of the community and to fit in with the existing pattern of information provision. It is for this reason that so much emphasis has been given in these guidelines to the assessment of community needs.

Once those needs have been assessed, however, it is possible to begin to design and to plan the development of the community information service. A number of basic principles should be followed during this design and planning process.

* Use a community development approach. It is crucial to accept that effective services cannot be imposed on communities, they must be set up from within the community itself. Further, the service should be designed so that it is managed and controlled by the community.

* Build on existing services. The existing information providers should be involved in the design of the new service and an attempt should be made to coordinated

developments. In some cases the most appropriate information service might be one which meets the needs of other informatiuon providers, leaving them to provide the service direct to people in the community.

* Use a range of information formats. An information service intended for direct use by rural people cannot be based on printed materials alone. It should build on traditional patterns of information seeking, and this will mean using oral communication reinforced by poster, charts, photographs, slides, films, audio tapes and realia.

* Use active information workers. The workers must understand the information that they are handling and they must be able to interpret and apply that information to the particular needs of the user. They should be able to repackage information from government and other organsiations into formats that are more appropriate to the villagers' needs. They should also record traditional knowledge.

* The information service should be two-way. The service should act as a communication channel from, as well as to, the local community. The service should enable the local community to feed back to government and others information on the impact of their policies and on areas of need not being met by policies or programmes.

* Learn from others. Build on the experience of others who have established rural community information services.

With these principles in mind, it is possible to begin the actual planning and design. Again it is worth emphasising that members

of the community should be involved in the process. This involvement might be achieved through informal discussion groups or it might be more appropriate to establish a formal management group or committee.

The first task should be to specify the objectives of the service. These objectives should cover: the groups in the community that will be served by the information service; the subject areas on which information will be provided; the relationship with other information providers; the style of work of the service, and the extent to which the service will do more than simply provide information.

It will be necessary to decide on a management structure for the service, to locate suitable premises and to decide on the opening hours. The planning will also have to include a consideration of the number and type of staff that will be required and whether they will need training.

It is also worth at this early stage thinking about the information materials and equipment which the staff will need.

Finally, careful thought needs to be given to the financial element of the service. How much money will be needed and where will it come from.

Monitoring and evaluating performance (pages 56 to 75)

To ensure that an information service remains effective and that it responds to the needs of the community which it serves, it is necessary to monitor and to evaluate its performance.

The monitoring and performance system should be designed in accordance with eight basic pricipIes. These are:

* Performance monitoring and evaluation should be an integral part of the management process.

* The measures used should relate performance to the needs of the community.

* The measures should assess performane within the limits set by the levels of resources available.

* Performance should be monitored in the context of the objectives of the service.

* Community information services provide an amalgamation of different services.

* The level of monitoring should be determined by the amount of detail required.

* Comparison is an essential aspect of performance monitoring and evaluation.

* Basic measures should be adapted to suit local circumstances.

The starting point should be the measurement of the reources used by the information service. The resources should be related to the size of the community served and figures should be expressed 'per thousand population'.

Information should be collected on the number of staff, their training and experience and their language skills. The monitoring

process should also assess the extent to which the staff reflect the composition of the community.

The information resources should also be measured, both in terms of the resources available to the service and the capacity of the service to produce resources to meet the needs of the community.

Finally the premises and equipment available for the service should be monitored.

Having measured the resources used by the service attention now focusses on the performance or output of the service. Here a range of different aspects of the service can be measured. The particular combination of measurements must be determined by the objectives of the service. The following range of possibilities should be considered:

* The range of enquiries. This will give a good indication of what the people in the community feel the service is good at doing.

* The number of enquiries.

* The number of people returning with a second enquiry. This is a good indicator of the extent to which the service is satisfying needs.

* The types of user. This shows whether the service is meeting the needs of all groups in the community.

* Detailed help and asistance. It may be worth recording separately enquiries which required detailed help.

* Information feedback. The volume of this work should be recorded.

* Resource centre work. Where the service aims to provide support to other information providers the extent of this work should be measured.

* Information work with groups. This is a significant element in the work of some centres and should be monitored.

* Repackaged information. The amount of work involved with producing new materials should be measured.

Measurement of resources and an appropriate range of outputs will provide a basis for the regular monitoring and evaluation of the service. This should be supplemented by occasional surveys to assess the attitudes and perceptions of people generally in the community, the users of the service and the providers of other services. Self-completion questionnaires, interviews and group discussions are the techniques which can be used to collect this information.

Evaluation can be a challenging and threatening experience for people working in a service and it is therefore important to involve them in the design of the monitoring and evaluation processes. They should be encouraged to provide a continuous flow of information about the efficiency and the effectiveness of the service.

The local community should also be involved in the evaluation. The final responsibility, however, must rest with the management group or committee.

Planning a community information service should be seen as a cyclical process which involves assessing the needs of a community; establishing objectives in the light of those needs: developing services which will enable the objectives to be achieved; providing services; monitoring and evaluating their performance; revising objectives in the light of performance and changed needs, and so on. Involving staff, management and the local community in this whole process will help to ensure that the community information service is appropriate to the needs of the community it serves.

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